

# At 70, beauty queen has philosophy of life sewed up

By JERI YOUNG  
THE CHRONICLE

You only live once - so Sarah Brooks figures you "might as well make it count."

The 70-year-old Winston-Salem resident was recently crowned Ms. Senior North Carolina. Winning the title earlier this month means that Brooks will head to Biloxi, Miss. in August to compete against 45 other seniors for the Ms. Senior America crown.

Not bad for a self-proclaimed "tomboy" who never dreamed of doing a pageant and spent her childhood playing with a group of nine rough and tumble boys.

"My mother, bless her heart, tried to make me a little lady," Brooks said with a chuckle. "I went to charm school and walked around with a book on my head. I had manners, but I would much rather have been out climbing trees...I guess my mother is in her grave smiling because I finally did something truly lady-like."

Brooks' road to the top began earlier this year when a friend suggested she enter the pageant. Brooks refused. The only time she had ever participated in one was when her daughter made it to the semi-finals of the Ms. Black New York pageant.

Then there was her other problem. The active senior, who cuts her own grass once a week and is a



Brooks

member of a number of local groups, just didn't think she had the time.

"I didn't call her back," Brooks said. "I just didn't feel like it. I didn't really want to do it. I had never done a pageant. I just wasn't interested."

After months of listening to her friends extol the virtues of pageant life, Brooks finally relented. And the rest, she says, is history.

"Two weeks before the pageant I finally decided to do it," she said. "I guess at that point, I realized I wanted to do it."

Brooks competed against five other North Carolina seniors.

Contestants were judged on their philosophy of life and a brief interview with judges. The five also modeled evening wear and showcased their talents.

She says her talent - a tap dance routine to the Mills Brothers' classic "Opus 1," sealed her victory. She began tapping again after a 60 year hiatus when she joined The Snappy Tappers, a group of local seniors who perform at events across the city.

"The people were so talented," she said. "One lady sang 'I Believe.' Another woman did a Minnie Pearl skit. I was really surprised that I won...The only thing we didn't do was model swimsuits. My daughter said I could have handled that with no problem."

Since winning the title, Brooks has performed "The Star Spangled Banner" at the opening of a nursing home in Durham, attended a couple of ribbon cuttings and was guest of honor at a local senior bingo tournament.

But the real test comes next month when she heads to Biloxi for the national pageant. Already she's begun a fundraising drive to help raise the \$2,000 she needs for her weeklong stay. And she's worked out a new talent - a tap routine of course.

"I'm going to do a new dance - a Charleston," she said, jumping up to show a fancy two-step and high kick. "I'm going to dress like a '70s flapper with beads and every-

# SCLC does away with women's issues group

By CARYLE MURPHY  
THE WASHINGTON POST

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which recently named Martin Luther King III its fourth president, has stunned many of its followers by deciding to sever ties to one of its most active components, the women's division.

The move, taken during a board meeting in Atlanta in April but not made widely known, has created tensions within SCLC just before its annual convention in Washington. The convention is to kick off July 25 with King's formal installation at Jericho City of Praise in Landover, a huge congregation with many female members, whose pastor is the Rev. Betty P. Peebles.

The SCLC board's 10 to 9 vote does not mean the women's division, which is incorporated as a separate entity under Georgia law, will disappear. But the board's move to end SCLC's relationship with it has shocked and puzzled

many longtime SCLC supporters.

"I'm gravely concerned and would like answers" said Melanie Hill, a longtime member and resident of Prince George's County who is executive director of a District-based nonprofit group. "I was upset. I'm just concerned that what happens with women [is] we get marginalized."

"I've had women all over the country call to say they are concerned and can't understand it," said Evelyn G. Lowery, of Atlanta, founder and head of the women's group. "It was hurtful to us."

Former D.C. Council member Wilhelmina Rolark, who serves on the SCLC board, declined to discuss the board's decision and referred questions to King. So did the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy of New Bethel Baptist Church, another board member, who said he did not attend the April board meeting.

SCLC spokesman David Stokes in Atlanta said on three occasions that he would pass along a reporter's request to speak with

King about the board's action, but the SCLC president did not return any of the calls.

Peebles, one of the area's most prominent female members of the clergy, declined to comment. "Not having been aware of [the decision] and since I don't know all the ramifications of it, I don't have a comment on it," Peebles said. "I don't know what the reasons were" for it.

The SCLC was founded in 1957 by a group of ministers including Martin Luther King Jr., who made the organization into a major force in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. But in recent years, the SCLC has had trouble defining its mission and raising money. King's son, who is 40, was named president last November.

SCLC/W.O.M.E.N., which stands for Women's Organizational Movement for Equality Now Inc., was founded in 1979 by Lowery, a veteran of the civil rights struggle and wife of Joseph E. Lowery, who stepped down as SCLC president last fall.



King III

After the board's vote in April, Evelyn Lowery urged her division's members not to complain publicly. But contacted last week by The Post, Lowery said the move came without warning or prior discussion with King. "The reason given was that we were competing with them... for money, I guess," Low-

ery said.

According to a June 9 letter sent by Lowery and others to supporters of the women's division, "the new president felt that the women's group was 'competitive' and that he had difficulty raising funds because of the women. Mind you, the new president had ignored our written requests to meet with him so he could understand our work."

The letter goes on to say: "Never did we dream that we would be targets of abusive and oppressive assaults from some members of the board of SCLC and the president... To add insult to injury... we have not been invited to engage in any discussions about the 1998 convention. We have been totally ignored."

The letter also says that on June 5, King informed the women's group's administrative assistant, LaSean Lane, that her salary would no longer be paid by SCLC's national office. "This was the only link SCLC financially had

with SCLC/W.O.M.E.N.," Lowery's letter states.

She said the women's organization runs programs in about eight cities but works mainly in Atlanta, where it has a mentoring program for low-income women and has given out \$300,000 in scholarships in recent years. The group also raised money to buy a building it uses for its programs but has deeded to the SCLC.

"We didn't want to be a cookie-caking, tea-sipping group," Lowery said. "We wanted to be involved helping the least of these, and that's what we've been doing."

"SCLC/W.O.M.E.N. thank God, is incorporated, so men cannot just come together and decide to eliminate a women's entity," said Felicia Davis-Gilmore, a Miami consultant and former Howard University student who is another longtime SCLC activist. "I find [the SCLC action] personally offensive," Davis-Gilmore added. "We've all struggled too hard to let it be done the way it was."

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